

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, March 20, 2015

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April 24: Student advisory council elections (see [below](#))

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. PARCC assessments begin in Rhode Island; 23,700 tests completed to date

Congratulations to everyone on your team on a successful first week of administration of PARCC assessments. Overall, test administration has proceeded smoothly, with no known security issues, with only a few technical issues that needed rectification, and with only a few communities experiencing significant numbers of test refusals. As of this morning, students have completed 23,700 PARCC assessments, with nearly 7,000 students taking assessments today. Across the PARCC consortium, students have successfully completed more than 5.3-million assessments.

One issue that arose this week across the PARCC consortium concerned on-going efforts to maintain test security. We have issued this statement on test security and student privacy:

All students deserve a fair test. Sharing images of test items through Twitter, Instagram, or other public social media sites – or posting a description of, or basic information about test items – creates an unfair test environment by providing students and teachers with advanced information about test questions.

Sharing test questions through social media is the modern equivalent of photocopying a test and passing it out on the schoolhouse steps. Cell phones are barred from the testing session, and we ask test administrators to tell all students that sharing any test question online is prohibited.

To protect students and to ensure that we administer a fair test, Rhode Island and the other states in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium have agreed to have our testing company, Pearson, search for any live PARCC test questions that are shared through **public** social media sites – a standard practice for large-scale tests, such as the College Board SAT tests.

At no time does Pearson (or any of its affiliates) monitor students. Pearson can see only what students have **publicly** displayed on their social media accounts. Pearson has no authority to or ability to access accounts where students have used privacy settings to limit who can see what they post. Our concern is limited to situations in which someone

has **publicly posted** secure test content for the world to see or if someone has discussed test items in such detail that it would help a student who takes the test later.

Rhode Island students began taking PARCC assessments on Monday (March 16), and we have had no reports to date of violations of test security. While we are administering PARCC assessments, Pearson uses search engines such as Google to look for key words and images of test items that are visible to the public on the web.

If Pearson comes across any instances of potential violations of test security (and can determine from publicly available information that the potential violation may have occurred in Rhode Island), Pearson will notify the R.I. Department of Education and we will follow up on the potential violation as appropriate – in particular, to ensure that the posted item is removed as quickly as possible.

I also want to clarify for you the issue of PARCC results appearing on student transcripts: PARCC results for this year's testing will not be placed on student transcripts. We have heard that there is some confusion about this matter, on the part of parents in particular. Please assure parents and others in your community who inquire about PARCC results that this year's testing provides baseline information for their child and that the results will not appear on their transcript.

2. AP participation, success rates continue to rise in R.I.; three R.I. districts named to AP Honor Roll

The College Board this week provided us with data about the performance of the Class of 2014 on AP exams. Among the highlights for Rhode Island:

- the number of high-school graduates (Class of 2014) having taken an AP exam: 2,690 – up 73 percent since Class of 2008;
- the number of graduates (Class of 2014) earning a score of 3 or higher on an AP exam: 1,576 – up 59 percent since the Class of 2008;
- the percentage of Black and Hispanic students taking AP Exams more than doubled over the past five years; and
- the percentage of Hispanic students earning a score of 3 or higher on an AP Exam more than doubled over the past five years.

Every year The College Board honors “outstanding school districts that simultaneously increase access to Advanced Placement coursework while increasing the percentage of students earning scores of 3 or higher on AP Exams.” This year, three Rhode Island school districts have made the 5th AP Honor Roll: Lincoln, Portsmouth, and South Kingstown. Congratulations to the educators and students in Lincoln, Portsmouth, and South Kingstown for significantly increasing participation in Advance Placement courses and success on AP tests!

3. *Reminder:* Design team seeks feedback by Wednesday on second prototype of strategic plan for education

I want to let you know that we continue to seek your feedback on this second prototype of our next strategic plan for education in Rhode Island. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the Ambassador Design Team members as they review and revise

their prototype and work toward developing a third prototype to release this spring.

I would be very grateful if you would use this link to review the Prototype 2 and provide the design team with your feedback by **Wednesday** at 6 a.m.:

www.ride.ri.gov/Plan-Feedback .

Please share this link with others on your team, in your network, and in your community.

We have also posted on our website a brief summary of the entire design process for developing and writing the strategic plan:

www.ride.ri.gov/Strategic-Plan.

With your help and engagement, I know that we are in the process developing an aspirational and ambitious strategic plan that will improve the lives of our students and their families for years to come.

4. Reminder: High schools to hold elections for student advisory council by April 24 – Action Item

Current state law requires that high schools hold elections for members of a student advisory council, whose chairperson will serve as a nonvoting member of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. I have sent this communication to all high-school principals; please be sure to remind your high-school principals of this responsibility:

As we work together to make important decisions about transforming education in Rhode Island, it is important to all of us that the voice of students is always a part of the process. To ensure that the voice of students is heard at the highest levels, current state law calls for the establishment of a student advisory council to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. The [legislation](#) (RIGL 16-60-2[c]) states that the student advisory council shall consist of one elected high-school student representative from each public secondary school in Rhode Island.

According to the law, each public secondary school shall hold elections for its representative no earlier than March 1 and no later than the end of the second full week in April (this year, April 17). Each high school shall select one representative, and that student must be enrolled as a student in grade 9, 10, or 11. Members of the student advisory council will serve from the May 1 of the year they are elected until the last day of April of the following year.

I encourage you to begin the election process in your school as soon as possible. By **April 24**, please forward the name of the individual who will represent your high school on the student advisory council to Angela Teixeira (angela.teixeira@ride.ri.gov), in the Commissioner's Office at RIDE. Once we receive the names of all of the students on the student advisory council, we will plan for an organizational meeting in May.

Finally, the law also stipulates that, before June 1, the student advisory council shall elect a chairperson from among its members. During the week of April 27, we will seek the names of those who wish to be considered for the

position of chairperson. The chairperson will serve as an ex officio and nonvoting member of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education for a term of one year, beginning on June 1.

Please feel free to call Angela Teixeira, at 222-8435, if you have questions or would like additional information about the student advisory council.

5. Four Rhode Island schools selected to participate in initiative on personalized learning

The New England Secondary School Consortium and the Great Schools Partnership have selected four Rhode Island secondary schools to “participate in a new initiative that will help them develop [personalized learning experiences](#) that address the distinct learning needs, interests, and aspirations of individual students.” Over the coming years, the Great Schools Partnership will provide each school with a team of school-improvement specialists, or school coaches, who will help school leaders and teachers implement their plans. Congratulations to the four Rhode Island schools selected to participate in this initiative: the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry, Central Falls High School, Cumberland High School, and Ponaganset High School (Foster-Glocester).

From RIDE

Accountability:

6. RIDE schedules webinar for March 27 on 2014-15 school accountability, proposed changes for accountability process

RIDE will host a webinar on Friday, March 27, from noon to 1 p.m., to explain our school accountability process for this year and to present the requests for revising that process beginning next year and through the 2017-18 school year. We have been working with an Accountability 3.0 Advisory Group for the past several months to discuss how we might improve our school accountability process based on lessons learned over the past few years. We are looking forward to sharing how that group shaped our ESEA Waiver Extension Submission, which is due on March 31. For those of you who aren't able to join the webinar at the scheduled time, we will post the webinar on the RIDE website under *Information & Accountability*.

To register, go to:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/4554018098318660865>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar. Please contact Mary Ann Snider (222-8492 or maryann.snider@ride.ri.gov) if you have any questions about this webinar.

Legal:

7. Commissioner's decision issued on payments from districts to charter public schools

A Commissioner's Decision holds that, on the basis of its governing charter, a charter public school is entitled to tuition payments from a district outside of catchment area for the student of a teacher who resides in the district:

http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2015/002-15_The_Learning_Community_v._Warwick%20_031015.pdf

From the U.S. Department of Education

8. Education Secretary provides information on measles outbreak

Please see this letter from Education Secretary Arne Duncan:

Dear Superintendents,

Several questions from educators, students, and their families have arisen since the initial outbreak of measles in December 2014. I am writing to share with you links to valuable information and resources produced by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), as well as information, resources, and links from the Department of Education (ED) addressing related education issues. In addition to links provided in this letter, enclosed is a list of relevant resources.

As with any disease that has the potential to affect our school communities, the CDC and its public health partners will have information about the signs, symptoms, and severity of the measles, as well as the proper steps to help prevent its spread.

Additionally, since schools play a critical role in raising awareness with families and communities, there are many steps they can take including:

- printing and sending CDC information and resources home with students;
- placing the text of CDC “matte” letters, or free-for-use articles, on a district’s website, in e-newsletters, and in other publications;
- posting the links to CDC information on schools’ social media accounts;
- sharing CDC content on your Web site through its [Content Syndication](#) (featuring automatic updates); and
- collaborating with state and local public health authorities (PHAs) and reviewing the CDC’s [vaccination Web page](#) for state-specific information on immunization policies.

Best practices for districts and schools include developing policies and procedures in consultation with their PHAs for protecting the school community and addressing how to:

- provide information on everyday actions to prevent the spread of disease, including [effective hand washing](#) and proper [cough and sneeze etiquette](#);
- provide information on vaccines and access to the vaccines within the community;
- properly safeguard the exchange of individuals’ medical information in compliance with applicable federal and state privacy laws; and
- ensure that there is not discrimination on the basis of a disability and that, when identifying and treating students and staff, individuals who are unable to

receive vaccines due to a disability are not discriminated against on the basis of their disability.

Day-to-day prevention and protection against infectious disease in schools is more effective when it is part of a comprehensive school emergency operations plan (EOP). An EOP can support the school system in the event of outbreak, epidemic, or pandemic and address a variety of possible diseases—viral, bacterial, and fungal. The protective measures in an EOP include a continuum of strategies for preventing the spread of germs.

Districts and schools should consider taking steps to ensure the continuity of learning outside of the classroom for students out of school for an extended period of time. For example, printed materials or online instructional tools may help students engage in meaningful learning activities to help them remain on track with their studies.

REMS TA Center resources:

- [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#)
- [Supporting Continuity of Teaching and Learning During an Emergency](#)
- [Online Courses](#)
- [Specialized Training Packages](#)

The Department's Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS) manages the [Readiness and Emergency Management of Schools \(REMS\) Technical Assistance \(TA\) Center](#), which serves as a hub to schools in providing information and resources for addressing infectious disease and supporting the whole school community. We are providing links to some of their valuable resources on this page, and you may wish to learn more about their resources on their website at:

<http://rems.ed.gov>.

I hope this information is helpful in the work you do to ensure students' safety.

Sincerely,

Arne Duncan

From other organizations

9. [Message](#) from Board of Education Chair Eva-Marie Mancuso, Esq.

Use this [link](#) to view a message from Eva-Marie Mancuso, Esq., Chair of the Board of Education.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx>